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TAGS: PGOV PREL SCUL KWMN SA
SUBJECT: WOMEN VOTE: STUDENT COUNCIL ELECTIONS A SUCCESS IN
PRINCE SULTAN UNIVERSITY

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Prince Sultan University College for Women (PSU) held its first student council elections on April 25. This private university is the first in Riyadh to establish student councils and hold elections. Following a campus-wide awareness training on the purpose of student councils, the importance of campaigns, and the elections process, there was an intensive week of campaigning for the 18 nominated students. During the week leading up to the elections, PSU hallways were covered in campaign posters advertising the platforms of each candidate. The campaigns largely targeted the health and the environment-- promoting green earth policies, conservation methods, healthy eating, and other related issues-- all top concerns of PSU's student body. Prior to election day, there was a press conference-- including the English-language newspaper Arab News-- during which students gave campaign speeches.

¶2. (U) Election day was as huge a success as the campaign itself. With the assistance of faculty advisors, students were highly organized and carried out election procedures in a proper, formal manner. They had one room set up with a bank of eight computers for voting and used election software designed specifically by the students. Each student signed in prior to entering the room, was then lined up and escorted into the room, voted, and escorted back out of the room in order to protect voter integrity and the secret ballot system created by the software. According to both students and faculty, election day was "electric" and the entire school was abuzz with excitement and pride for being able to carry out such a new and comprehensive task.

¶3. (C) Dean Fadia al-Saleh and Vice Dean Amal al-Toaimy told PolOff on April 30 that they were surprised by the students' enthusiasm and seriousness during the campaign. On the first day some students tried to bring in food to encourage votes, but the faculty rejected this attempt, telling the students to win voters with their "minds not their stomachs." The Dean said they embraced this notion and each day had new campaign posters delineating their plans. When asked if the PSU male college also held student council elections, the Dean responded that they did, but did not enjoy the same success as the women's college. According to her, the PSU Rector called to congratulate the female student council members and told the Dean that the enthusiasm and professionalism displayed by the female participants was commendable. He further said that he will do his best to openly support its function and development at PSU. He commented that only 30 percent of the male students voted-- compared to 71 percent of the female students, and that the male students' campaigns had less passion, innovation, and creativity than that demonstrated during the female students' campaign.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The enthusiasm and effectiveness of the

student council candidates during the election process is a promising sign -- especially give their lack of prior experience. This is a clear example of democratic principles in action. However, PSU is a private university with students from prominent and more open-minded families than is the norm in Saudi Arabia. It remains to be seen whether other universities, especially public ones, will take similar steps to create a representational mechanism for students. More importantly, it remains to be seen how tolerant the SAG would be of such a trend. END COMMENT.

GFOELLER